

[S. H. Blalock]

1

Words

EDITORIAL FIELD COPY

by

Mrs. Florence Angermiller, P.W. Folkstuff - range lore

APR 25 1938

Page 1

[?]

Range Lore and

Cowboy Reminiscences Before and after 1875 UVALDE COUNTY, DISTRICT #10

RECEIVED

APR 25 [?]

WORKS PROGRESS

ADMINISTRATION

SAN ANTONIO

TEXAS

Library of Congress

S. H. BLALOCK

Eagle Pass, Texas.

Sam Houston Blalock belongs to the [vaqueros?] of the Southwest, in that he was a cowpuncher in the early days when our fathers were first settling this country. He followed herds before there were fences or many settlers. Indians had to be watched, wild animals and wild cattle were numerous and the cow outfits worked large territories often using the rivers as boundaries no matter how many miles it covered.

His days in the saddle gave him the endurance and the hardy constitution so common to the frontiersmen. His speech is deliberate and has changed very little from the cowboy vernacular of early days. The account which follows is in his own words but one misses the expression in his voice and amused chuckles throughout:

"I will be 80 years old the 10th day of July. I was born in Bastrop County, one-half mile east of Lockhart on my father's ranch. I worked on his ranch till I went to Frio County in 1875. That town down there was called Frio Town. I came there in November, 1875 , and went to work for a man named Sam Hutchison, the next day after I got there.

"I don't recollect how old I was when I began working stock, or how old I was the first pair of boots I owned, but I think I was 6 or 7 years old and I believe my boots beat Bob Little's a little. Mine were brass-toed and had red tops. By George, they were the stuff. C12 - 2/11/41 - Texas

2

"The first saddle I ever had , I was about 10 years old. It was just a common, half-rig saddle. You never seen no fancy saddles them days except ones the Mexicans brought over sometimes.

Library of Congress

"I worked for Hutchison till '78 and worked with cattle the whole time. In fact, I never worked with anything else in my life, or knew anything else. I taken care of the pasture of cattle and horses. Down there is where I saw my first mustang.

"Now those mustangs ran in bunches and every stallion had his own band of mares and he herded 'em just/ like you would herd cattle. He made them go just where he wanted them to go and I've seen 'em drive their herd just like cowboys driving cattle. Just let one get contrary or lag behind, he soon put them where he wanted them. I have seen them put different ones out of the herd, generally their own colts about two years old. Those colts would go to the other bunches, of course, and sooner or later have herds of their own.

"I caught a few horses while I was working there, probably four or five later on, down there about where Moore's station is. Bob Little, Ed and Garret Wilson and me were running. Bob was about 21 years old then. Before this, J. E. Berry had roped a mustang in a pen with some of his horses and that mustang jumped the fence with Berry's raw-hide lariat on him. He had got with a bunch of gentle horses and we say him. I told the boys that if they they'd run that bunch of horses under that tree, I would catch him. Well, I got up there and they brought 'em under and I snared 'im. He nearly put me out of that tree. I thought he was going to shake the tree down. e throwed him down and put a hackimore on him and I told them to take 'im down to the horse camp and turn him over to John Swindler. He was taking care of the horses. Swindler kept him tied or staked out several days 3 till I got back and then I rode 'im and gentled 'im. He wasn't very hard to break. He sure was a pretty horse and when I left there I took him with me.

"I sure wanted that lariat and had it on my saddle till one day Jim Berry saw it and asked me if I got it off a mustang, and I told him I did. He told me all about catching this horse and roping him so, of course, I gave him the lariat but I sure hated to.

"The prettiest mustang I ever saw was a dappled-gray stallion. He was the prettiest thing I ever saw before or since. Nobody never could catch him either. A fellow killed him after

Library of Congress

that, because he couldn't catch him. He was too smart. Several of us tried to get him but we never could catch him no kind of way. You could get his whole bunch that was with him and run them in a herd of other horses and get them in a pen. He would run in thirty feet of the herd and wouldn't go in. He would never run any closer than that. We could catch his whole bunch but he seemed to know that it was a trap to catch him and he just wouldn't go in. We couldn't snare him or pen him.

“There were lots of polomillos running with them mustangs. They were dun colored and had white manes and tails. There were a good many paints too and I always saw those red paints up to a few years ago. Now, nearly all the paints you see in the country, expecially at the rodeos, are black and white paints. The black paints are really the best horses.

“On the 7Ds, they had five wild, mean horses and nobody could catch them two-year-olds. I finally snared two of them. You see, they kept collecting one or two other gentle horses and I took a bunch of cow horses and turned 'em loose and had John Johnson, one of my hands, find those wild horses so we turned the gentle ones with them. Man! They did try to get out of there. I clumb up on a tree and told 'em to herd 'em under there and I snared the wildest one, a big gray 4 stallion. You ought to have seen that tree shake! He sure was a pretty thing but after we caught him, a Mexican was leading him and one was driving him and he run over the rope and it throwed him. It broke his leg. We turned him loose in the pasture but his leg grew back [?] and we had to kill him later. There was a brown horse with this gray that we caught and he had already been broke. We saddled him up right there and rode him off. He had been a good saddle horse but was running wild now.

“I tell you how we roped those mean steers. We had a couple of necking steers or oxen. We would rope them old steers and tie them u up to a tree pretty short where they could go round and round the tree, and we would leave them about two days or three and then take the oxen and neck 'em together. He would take them right back to the pen and we would leave them there and feed and water them. They would make the best cattle in the

Library of Congress

world to handle. Them old steers was business. I have seen them old necking-steers that you could take out and neck to a wild steer and every time, he would bring that steer to that camp. He might be a day or two bringing him in but he would bring 'im.

“Talk about game in this country then! They were all over it. I tell you what I knowed two fellows just before Christmas to do. They would go out and kill deer to ship east and one day one of them killed sixteen and one killed seventeen. They were in bunches — you could kil all them things you wanted. After that, they went out one night to kill turkey for Christmas and they killed 101 and shipped them. Why, a [?] we didn't think much of them as meat, for we preferred fat beef and had 5 plenty of that. You could kill them deer with six-shooters; yes, that close!

“I was at the Hutchison ranch house one morning and I heard a bunch of turkeys coming. You could hear them coming a mile yelping. I looked out and the whole creek bottom was black with them. Why, when we were out cow hunting, we always had all the turkey eggs we could eat.

“In them days, it used to be worlds of wild hogs. They wasn't javalinas — they was plain old American hogs. They would get fat them days. We could take some good dogs and a gun and kill enough to load the wagon down.

“There was lots of lobo wolves and panthers then too. Once I was riding along and heard a calf bawl and I rode out there and there was two of them had the calf caught and when they saw me, they turned the calf loose and run off. Man! They was sure bad to kill calves. And panthers! They are sure bad after colts. Down in Mexico you can't raise a colt hardly; they'll kill every one of them.

“You have no idea the changes since that day. There was no railroad west of San Antonio. Now, I am going to tell you how they fenced. This man had started fencing and he put up what was called the 'cross fence.' He paid Mexicans from Mexico to come with ox carts and build the fence at \$160 a mile. He only had about six sections and I think t there was

Library of Congress

about six or seven miles of fence. He was building that fence when I went to work for him. He had a herd of cattle - about 300 head and I herded them cattle, me and another, all winter till he got this fence done. Then he turned them cattle loose in there.

"Ed Rutledge joined him and built another fence there and they was the only fences in there. One of them was on one side of the Seco and the other was on the other side.

"I think it was in '76 that the Indians come in there and killed a Negro for us. It was while I was working for Sam Hutchison. Up above his ranch six miles on the Seco Creek where he lived, he got three Negroes to build a pen. We were going to catch wild cattle and we needed the pen. They were building the pen down on a little creek called Elm and back in the other direction was a little hill. One of those Negroes, John Flores, had a pair of mules hitched to a wagon and he was loading mesquite poles to take back up there to build this pen with. He said he happened [??] up on the hill and saw a man ride up on it and he said to himself 'That might be Indians.' The Indians was watching the Negro that was building the pen and he said this Indian passed in 150 yards of him but he never did see him. He said the Indian had long hair like a woman and a long pole [?] a durk knife tied [?]. The third Negro was up farther west of the pen cutting timber. The one who saw the Indian couldn't notify the others without drawing the attention of the Indian to himself. He never saw the Indian [?] the old Negro who was digging the post holes, but when we got down there after he got to the ranch to tell what happened, we could see that the old fellow didn't seem to make any resistance. He must have been taken entirely by surprise for it looked like the Indian made a long jump and run right up to him and the old Negro just gave up. He left the post nearly [?] down and everything just like he laid it down to walk off. The first Negro's tracks looked about ten feet apart when he left there to give the alarm. The third Negro said he was up there working but I thought it was strange that the Indian didn't see him for he went right close by as he took the other old Negro off. This was Friday and he never found 7 the old fellow till the next Friday evening. They killed him the day they got him. We went on and finished the pen and went to gathering cattle. When we found him, he was swelled up big as a horse and we couldn't move him or bury him either. We just

Library of Congress

had to throw some blankets over him and some dirt. He had two bullet holes in him and his left hand was pinned to his breast with an arrow.

“It was 15 years after that that we had gone up to Devil's River and this other Negro was with us that claimed he was working up west of where the old Negro was taken. I asked him about it then and he said he was going to tell me just how it was. He said he got to thinking about if an Indian would slip up and kill him and his knees got so weak he couldn't stand up, he had to lie down. I always thought he was asleep and I am sure now that he was.

“The Indians weren't afraid of a Negro at all. They were afraid of white men but they seemed to hate a Negro and would kill him every chance they got.

“These same Indians went on down to another creek where there was a little settlement of people. Shackelford had a cow camp on this creek close to the settlement and he had a calf tied out not far from the camp to kill the next morning. These Indians slipped up there that night and took the rope off of the calf and turned it loose but didn't get any of the horses. But they went down to Old Man Perry Wilson's. He had a horse pasture fenced entirely with brush — every bit of it. These Indians went in that pasture that night and got every one of his horses. Among these horses was a big , gray horse and they killed him ate him. They left a great big chunk of that horse meat sticking on a stick where they had broiled it.

“Two of the boys, John/ Wilson and Bob Roland, got on their pet horses 8 next morning to ride out and get the horses and found them all gone. One of them Indians saw them and made a run at them and the boys knew it was Indians. They turned round and if they didn't lay it on them ponies going back to the house!

“The Indians had roped a half-wild horse, on that raid, that belonged to [?] Bailey. The horse got away from them and had a rawhide lariat on him forty feet long. The rawhide hadn't been dressed so well; there was hair still on it. We found the horse with the rope

Library of Congress

wound up around a log and if we hadn't found him when we did, he would have starved to death.

"They came in there again in '77 to a sheep camp and killed a man that was fixing to dip his sheep. The herder saw the Indians kill him but had to stay hid. The Indians went down on Squirrel Creek into Jeff Johnson's pasture and went in and out of a gate and got a bunch of his horses. There was an old Mexican named Jesus Sanches that said he spoke to them but they didn't answer when they came by his house. He lived close to the gate they went out of and he knew they were Indians then so he got his gun and shot at them. They ran off. They were traveling east then. Some of them turned south toward the Frio River and Jim Berry was down there gathering wild cattle with a bunch of Mexican hands. He had a bunch of slow-herd cattle and he found where some wild cattle had crossed the trail and he was trailing them when one of the Mexicans in the rear hollered, 'Indians!' He looked and saw an Indian sitting on a white horse. This Indian took after them and he beat the Indian to the river. The Mexican jump jumped off the bank of the river and got away. They went on down and crossed that river about three miles below town and they call it 'Indian Crossing' yet. They turned up the river west to a sheep camp where they were dipping or shearing sheep. There were four or five Mexicans there and they killed every one of them. When help got there, one of the Mexicans wasn't quite dead and he told them that there was a white man with those Indians and described him. Jim Berry knew who it was as soon as the Mexican told him and said the fellow had been staying right there in Frio Town. When those Indians left there with those horses, they made a clean get-away and never was heard of or seen and none of the horses ever seen.

"I think along about then was the first time I ever saw Uvalde. It didn't have any of them plazas then. It was just a wide place in the road. It was more than tough too, I want to tell you. I have heard of many a thing that happened there and saw quite a few little things myself a little later on, though I never did stay around town very long at a time. But Uvalde was just a little settlement in the brush.

Library of Congress

"I have heard people say that they knew this country when you couldn't get a riding switch, but I have knowed it since '78 and it was always brushy. Where it was brushy, it was bad and where it was open, it was open. East of Uvalde was open mostly then.

"Down around Pearsall, that old sage grass was up to your saddle stirrup then. You could see it waving like the waves on the Gulf when the wind blew. It was easy for all kinds of wild animals to hide in there and snakes too. And of course, turkeys had a paradise as well as coyotes. You can imagine that country being all open and them mustangs running in there for miles and miles. They would go twenty-five or thirty miles to water for there wasn't no fences to hinder 'em. The wild cattle ranged the same way, though they didn't go so far to water, but them old steers and bulls was wild as deer. During them big roundups, all the outfits worked and I remember all them old ranchmen around there for we had some good neighbors on the Seco.

"Old Man Rol Miller lived up there on the Seco and him and Hutchison were good friends. I remember Old Man Miller had some bees at his house and they were so mean he hadn't been able to rob them or to get anybody else to. There were about eight stands, I think. We had gone there to buy some cattle and were gathering them then. He liked me and asked me if I could rob bees. I told him yes and he got me to stay there that day and help him. Well, we robbed them bees and got two big wash tubs full of comb honey. He couldn't have robbed them himself.

"I left Hutchison in about three years and I had three good saddle horses and fifty-five head of cattle. I only made twelve dollars a month, so you see I didn't make all them cattle working. No fooling, I was a pretty good rustler.

"Jim Shakelford, Talt Roland, Bob Roland and myself went over to Loma Vista on a creek called [Tortuga?] Creek and made a camp there. We roped wild cattle all winter. The cattle belonged to everybody. There were Nunn, Daughtery, Blackally, Lawhorn, Adams and others. That was in '78 and some of them old steers was branded right after the war. I

Library of Congress

know some of them old steers was 25 years old. I seen two steers that was thirty years old and another one that was twenty-eight years old. Baylor bought a bunch of old steers to ship and I had put 'em over there in a pen and a Mexican said that one was thirty years old and the other was twenty-eight because he raised 'em. I saw a little old red steer once from Arkansas that was thirty years old.

"I've seen horses live thirty years too. I gave Lew Blackally a horse named Redbird that he roped on all the time and he kept him till he was twenty-six years old.

"We roped those wild steers and we would find a man who was going to take a herd to Kansas and we would sell them for four dollars a steer 11 and about two-fifty a cow. We kept the yearlings ourselves and sure had a pretty little bunch. We stole all the rest we could, of course. We caught about a hundred head that winter. We made a little money, not much. Nothing else to do them days. We had our own camp and our own grub which was black coffee, cornbread and beef. We had that all the time and I have lived on that most of my life. That was the healthiest living on earth. When we ate up one beef, we went and got another; didn't make any difference whose it was, just so it was fat.

"We went back to Frio County and I went to work for Old Man Perry Wilson in '79. I married one of his daughters, in '82. Her name was Alice. She was dark, and had dark eyes. She was a small woman, about 105 pounds, and a good ranch hand. We had four children: Etta (who died), Myrtle, Alvin and Ora.

"Perry Wilson moved his cattle to Devil's River in '86 and I also went up there and stayed three years, on the headwaters of Devil's River I taken my cattle along. My wife went along on that trip and after we got there we had to live in a tent for about three months, in fact, all winter. I brought her back down home for it sure gets cold up there.

"When we was moving those cattle to Devil's River, it was out here about Brackett that we had such an awful stampede. There was about 1,200 head that trip and we lost them all. We were two days gathering them. We got nearly all of them — maybe twelve head

short. I was on herd when the stampede come off and it was a plumb good one. I never did know what scared them. It was a moonshine night and bright as it could be. And we never could stop them cattle—just had to let 'em go. They run right through camp and this fellow, Swindler, was in bed. A little old yearling run right over him. That tickled me worse than anything that happened. Golly, he sure squalled.

12

“There were some of the biggest catfish in Devil's River in the world. One boy caught one that weighed 140 pounds. No, I never caught a big fish because I never liked to fish. Once, Tom Wilson caught a catfish out of there that weighed sixty-five pounds. He had a sheep camp up on the river there and caught this fish and he had it tied to the horn of his saddle and the tail drag the ground.

“We sold out our cattle, in about three years, to a fellow named Ryburn and when I left there, I went back down to the old Wilson ranch and Old Man Perry went to Lower California. Me and John Wilson built up our herd to about seven-hundred head.

“Right there is where I struck the meanest horse I ever got hold of. He didn't throw me but it was bad enough. I could ride any of them then and it didn't hurt me but I wouldn't like to do it again. It was there on this ranch and the horse was a range horse and belonged to Will Craig. He said nobody else could ride him and he got me to take him with me and ride him. It took me about a week to get him to where I could ride him without him pitching. He was the meanest horse I ever saw in my life. He was a brown horse — brown all over — and he was a small horse too. He just pitched and I kept him in a pen a week before I could ever get him broke. He didn't go off, he just pitched and balked. He would pitch himself down and me too.

“In '92, I left the Wilson ranch and went up to the 7Ds. There was a fellow named Bill Henson had this job before I did and he got sick on that Pearsall ranch of the 7Ds and had to go to San Antonio, so they got me to take his place till he got back. But he died, so

Library of Congress

I stayed on. Old Man John Oliver was running this ranch close to Le Pryor and Old N.T. Wilson wanted me to come out there and take Oliver's place. I told him I didn't want to do that. They were giving me \$65 a month but they told 13 me they would give me a hundred dollars if I would come out there. They said they were going to let Oliver go, anyway. Well, I took the job and stayed there nine years.

“Speaking of good cowhands, I had a Negro hand by the name of John Johnson and I know that no cowhand ever beat John. I knew Alf Tollett — he was John's stepfather — and he sure was a hand but I don't believe he was a bit better than John. John worked for me the whole time I was there. Cal Spier and Walter Winter worked for me too. I think there are about three of the Mexicans alive out of the six that worked with me at that time. I know Eusovio Martinez and Martin Padilla are still alive, and Cal said he saw old Gregorio last year and his head was white as cotton. Me and Cal have been thinking about getting all that old bunch together that we used to work with and pull off a regular chuck wagon barbecue and celebration. We want to have just a regular cow camp with a chuck-wagon there, and invite everybody. I know all our old bunch would be there that's living.

“I took that one outfit and worked that whole country and that same bunch stayed with me nine years. But we sure did work. We had the worst cattle in the world to handle. There were old bulls ten and twelve years old that never had been branded and old steers twelve or thirteen years old. There was lots of animals in there with no brand on 'em at all. Darndest mess I ever saw. We roped, necked and brought 'em into a trap and afterwards, we rounded up these steers and taken them to the Pearsall ranch which had about 37,000 acres in it. We caught 2,400 big steers at one time and shipped them to Dennison and they were wild ones too.

“We would take a bunch of our range cattle out and run these wild cattle into 'em and then go in there and take 'em on to the pasture.

Library of Congress

When Oliver was there, I asked him about how many steers he thought was in that ranch and he said about 1,400. I caught 2,800. We roped steers out of those pastures five years. We would rope till we thought we had them all and next winter we would find some more.

“That's where John Johnson come in. He could trail like a dog. He had the best eyes I ever saw in a human's head. He would trail a brute all day long till he got him. He was simply the best cowman I ever worked with in my life. He is about as good as ever now, I guess, though he is about my age. I am pretty sure he still has good eyes, but my eyes went back on me is why I had to quit the ranch. John is working down on the Flowers ranch now and I don't know what Flowers would have done without him. I haven't seen him in twenty years and I sure would love to see old John again.

“That 37,000 acre pasture was at Pearsall and there was another pasture on the Leona that had the same amount in it. The Nueces ranch or the Pryor Ranch had 92,000 acres in it and the Frio ranch had 15,000. Now, that is what I worked with one outfit. I was the only man that ever went in there and cleaned it up. When they sold out, we gathered 5,553 steers off of the Nueces ranch for Bill Mangum. Bill Jennings bought 1,500 off of the Leona ranch and we shipped the Pearsall ranch cattle, then delivered 1,800 cattle off of the Frio. But I sure had some real men in that outfit or we never could have done it.

“I wouldn't like to live those days again. We went through too much. Of course, we had lots of fun too. We had kangaroo court many a time and they have put the leggings on me too. There were certain things you done and you was always found guilty. You couldn't beat a case at all. I recollect one time that we all wanted to whip Martin Padilla so we tried him for something and put the leggings on him. We 15 laid him down and we sure poured it on him. After we got through, he asked us if he had had his whipping and we were satisfied about it. We told him yes and the devil got up and pulled a big old coat out of his pants that he had stuffed down there, knowing we were going to whip him. Those whippings hurt, I tell you. There's no question about that — but you couldn't do anything about it.

Library of Congress

“When I went down to the Mariposa ranch in Mexico during the revolution, me and Bob Dow, Walter Scott, Tom Vivian and Ellis Perry rode in one of the first makes of cars that ever come to this country and it reminded me of the first cars I ever saw around Uvalde. The first one was an old Brush and then Dave Pryor brought in the next one and it was the kind we went down there in to get a herd of cattle. Them old horses that used to be around Uvalde — when they saw an automobile, you could see them old hacks just a-flyin' and the dust a-foggin'. Man, them old horses would go wild and they had some real run-aways them days.

“When we brought then cattle back from Mexico that time, we crossed the Rio Grande up here about eight miles above Eagle Pass and we lost one of our Mexican hands that trip. The river wasn't up bad but it was swift. We got those cattle to the river about two hours by sun and we swum 'em across in little bunches at a time. We had a Mexican on the other side to turn 'em up the hill into a pasture. The cattle could hardly swim in that swift water.

“John Johnson was with us. The Mexican on the other side called to one that was with us, after we finished crossing the cattle, to come go to town. The one he called to told him no, but another one said he would go. John told him not to do that, that if he did, he might not make it. He also told him if he must go, to pull off his clothes. The Mexican had told me earlier in the day that he couldn't swim and we tried to keep him from going into it. But he rode right into that 16 water and it carried him, horse and all right on down the river. The old horse wouldn't swim, either, he just sort of floated down and the Mexican sitting on top of him. But the water washed the Mexican off the horse, finally, and I heard him call to the Mexican that was riding down the river trying to get to him, to hurry for he was drowning. But the other Mexican couldn't get to him and he disappeared. He was found down close to the bridge two or three days afterward. The old horse sort of floated out back on the same bank he left from.

Library of Congress

"That old river is sure mean. Old Man Ab Blocker has driven herds to Kansas and the Black Hills and he said this old Rio Grande was the worst stream he ever tackled to swim herds across and the most treacherous.

"In 1922, I went down into Mexico and went to work for the Kincaid Brothers on the La Gacho ranch. I worked down there till 1926 and then came back over here and went over to Carrizo and worked with my son, Alvin, about seven years. Worked over there till I got to where I couldn't see, so I came back here. I haven't been back to Uvalde since 1922 but it is the best little town in Texas. I have two daughters by my second marriage. Their names are Maxine and Mildred. My first wife died a long time ago when I had my family in Uvalde to send the children to school. I married Josie Beaupois then. I have a daughter here — Mrs. Clarence Milam who was Ora, and a daughter in Uvalde, Mrs. Altheldra Milam (Myrtle). Alvin has a ranch over in the Carrizo country and he is a good ranchman.

-30-